

**AMPHISBAENIANS (REPTILIA:
AMPHISBAENIDAE) IN NESTS OF *ATTA SEXDENS*
(HYMENOPTERA: FORMICIDAE)
IN EASTERN AMAZONIA, BRAZIL¹**

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ABSTRACT: Two species of Amphisbaenians (*Amphisbaena alba* and *A. mitchelli*) were discovered in nests of the leaf-cutting ant *Atta sexdens* in Pará, Brazil. This is a new habitat and locality for Amphisbaenians in eastern Amazonia.

There are several reports of reptiles inhabiting ant and termite nests, especially amphisbaenids (Weber, 1972; Brandão and Vanzolini, 1985; Riley *et al.*, 1985). Amphisbaenids are cryptic worm lizards that spend most of their life time burrowed in the ground. Therefore, any information about these animals is useful. In this note, we describe the occurrence of two species of *Amphisbaena* in ant nests, one being a first record in an ant nest and both being new distributional records.

This work was carried out in a secondary forest area in Vitoria Farm (2°55'S, 47° 35'W), Paragominas (see Nepstad *et al.*, 1991 for a detailed description of the area), northeastern Pará, Brazil. In May 1993, the junior author excavated two nests (ca. 0.8 x 1.8 m) of the leaf-cutting ant *Atta sexdens* (L.) to a depth of 3.5 m. During the excavations, two species of *Amphisbaena* (one specimen in each nest) were found: *A. alba* (L.) (length 331 mm; weight 31 g) and *A. mitchelli* Procter (186 mm; 3g). *Amphisbaena alba* was found inside the refuse chamber at a depth of 3.5 m, while *A. mitchelli* was found in the fungus chamber at a depth of 0.5 m. Both specimens are deposited in Museu P. E. Goeldi, Belém, Pará, Brazil (*A. alba* # 16398; *A. mitchelli* # 16399).

Amphisbaena alba is known as "mãe de saúva" (mother of leafcutting ants) in Brazil, which reflects its association with ant nests. There is no report of *A. alba* in an *Atta sexdens* nest in the literature, although various authors described the occurrence of *A. alba* in nests of several species of related ants (Weber, 1972; Riley *et al.*, 1985) including the use of the nests by these reptiles to deposit their eggs (Vaz-Ferreira *et al.*, 1970; Weber, 1972; Riley *et al.*, 1985). The fact that its eggs have never been found elsewhere may indicate an obligate association (Riley *et al.*,

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1985), although it does not appear to have a restricted association with this species of ant. Neither *Amphisbaena* species had been recorded before in the Paragominas region. Therefore, this locality is new to their distribution area, even though Paragominas is within their expected area of occurrence (see Gans, 1962, 1964; Hoogmoed and Avila-Pires, 1991). Gans (1964) reported that *A. mitchelli* was found burrowed, but did not mention an association with ant nests. This is the first record for *A. mitchelli* in an ant nest.

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